

## Historical records and Research publications in the Perversion of Truth in the world of Academics

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History and Literature have always been accepted as the great colossi on which the cultures of the world have been perched. There is far too much of confidence placed herein, in the belief that they would eternally stand there to send forth beams of light towards mankind, to light up their pathways for the future. But honesty of pursuit, sincerity of judgement and indefatigable application have stirred us on many an occasion to call this in question. History and literature, we would not hesitate to say, are by no means heaven-sent writings on the wall, to enlighten and educate mankind. They can be discovered to have their own secret motivations, lying buried deep beneath the surface, to lead or mislead mankind, as it clearly becomes evident everyday in the senseless utterances made at world level, via historical records and literary evidence, quite often found to be misquoted.

In this study, we shall remain strictly confined to Buddhism and Sri Lankan history. It has necessarily to be so in view of the staggering amounts of scandalously misleading bits of information on the aforesaid subjects presented to the world of learning as neo-scientific research. We shall begin with the story of the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka via the philanthropy and magnanimity of Emperor Asoka of India. The inestimable worth of these missions which were dispatched to the world outside the Gangetic valley, particularly in western Asia in countries like Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq, has been precisely assessed in recent years by archaeologists and historians at world level like Professor Litvinsky. Solid evidence like archaeological remains lie before us as the basis of these assessments and assertions [See Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, Sri Lanka, IV. 151 f.]

However, in the more recent years, this process of contamination appears to

have been globally accelerated. No matter where it has had its origin, Sri Lanka has been more often targeted than any other country for these neo-scientific sociological and anthropological analyses and scannings. It is more than unfortunate that the majority of those who mount guns against Sri Lankan history and culture, as well as ethics and aspirations of Buddhism have been born and bred in Sri Lanka and as they themselves like to claim as Sinhala Buddhists. Over the years, we have had the need to challenge some of these claims and demolish their acceptability. Admittedly, now that they are living outside the land of their birth, they have come to be accepted as persons of far larger stature. In the world of less-informed Asian scholarship like Sri Lankan history and Buddhist teachings these audacious looking adventures of theirs are to us no more than Don Quixotic.

For want of time and space, we would be able in this study to flash on the red lights at the academic traffic signals only a few times. Sorry. Even in spite of red flashes at the death-dealing corners in the world of religio-cultural studies on Sri Lanka, those above the grade of professors in our educational circles assume that they have a right to drive at whatever break-neck speeds they choose, heedless of the wreckages they bring about on the culture of the land of their birth.

One of the vital issues in this context, in our opinion, is the life and activities of King Duṭu Gemunu in Sri Lankan history. This needs to be studied, not by individuals who have been picked up according to the whims and fancies of high-ups, but by a body like the International Jurists, by persons bereft of individual, family and clan interests. It certainly cannot be a mere Nuremberg Trial.

Sri Lankans have what they call a national history in a chronicle, written in Pali in metrical form, by the name of Mahāvamsa. Everybody knows a great deal about it, sometimes in tatters and hand-picked strands, according to personal likes and dislikes. Let it be briefly known that the writing of this chronicle was started about the sixth century A.D. by a Buddhist monk by the name of

Mahānāma. A senior complementary companion to this, perhaps written with a different motivation, is the Dīpavaṃsa, also written in Pali in metrical form. This latter, it may be discovered, has a monastic and therefore a more institutional authentic character as against the Mahāvaṃsa which avowedly plays up to the nationalist sentiment of religious elation, devotion and dedication: *sujana-ppasāda-saṃvegatthāya kate*.

In this study, we pick up one single incident from the life of King Duṭu Gemunu as narrated in the Mahāvaṃsa which, in being presented in the Sinhala language by a particular scholar, over a couple of centuries ago, has suffered a serious derailment on one single point. But this mis-translation in Sinhala, due to the eminence of the translator of very recent years, and perhaps other less known reasons, has come to be nationally accepted, and arrogantly defended from time to time, as the standard version. We shall take it up in detail, for reasons of national and international justice, in due course. Duṭu Gemunu's war in Sri Lanka against the Damilas was catapulted by the menacing destructive hostile attitude they were adopting towards the newly introduced religion and culture of Buddhism in the island which was sponsored by Emperor Asoka of India and directed towards both the eastern and the western neighbours in Asia like Middle Eastern countries of Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq and those of the east and the south-east like Sri Lanka and Myanmar.

Duṭu Gemunu, as well as his father Kākavaṇṇa Tissa had witnessed enough of the devastation that was being caused to the newly established Buddhist culture that was gaining ground in the island. It was virtual anarchy in Anuradhapura where the Damila ruler Elara was turning a totally blind eye to the ruthless attacks the Damilas were inflicting on the majority community in the sacred regions of the land like Anuradhapura. Buddhist shrines like the pagodas and Bodhi trees were being destroyed. Buddhist monks were physically harassed. Sound historical researches at University levels have highlighted these atrocities with clarity and adequate authenticity [See University History of Ceylon,

Vol. I. Part II. p. 563]. We also discover at times thinly veiled, deep buried attempts by certain sections of the monastic community in Sri Lanka to cover up and underrate these misdeeds and present the alien ruler as a perfectly just king.

In defence of this impending disaster, Gemunu had to declare an unambiguously clear war against this minority enemy in the land, who also being constantly aided and abetted by their neighbouring ethno-cultural allies of South India, were on a war path of total devastation. It had to be a total cleansing by the Buddhists to safeguard their newly received gift from North India of the religion and culture in the land. To the enemy, Buddhism which was rapidly becoming a tremendous unifying force among the Sinhalas was the total target of their attack.

Sri Lankans had to realise this and the leadership of the south, with Gemunu and the royal house of Rohana with far-sighted Kākavaṇṇa Tissa, audacious Vihāra Devi and tenacious Saddhatissa had to lead. No tremors of religious fanaticism whatsoever, nor outbursts of national arrogance, as interested parties like Walpola Rahula would like to put into our heads, were ever felt in Sri Lanka at the time. [See History of Buddhism Ceylon by Walpola Rahula - 1956]. A relentless war of defence had to be fought and it was the wisdom of the Royal House of Rohana in the south that decided that the enemy at this very early stage, had to be effectively curbed, long before the enemy or any of their arch-political allies spoke of traditional homelands. [For further details on these issues, their authors and related researchers, please read what I have said about these twenty years ago and have been published in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka - New Series - volume XXXII, 1989, under my then lay name Jotiya Dhirasekera].

In a situation like this, Gemunu did indeed have to go to war. This he did, and according to the Mahāvamsa, carrying with him relics of the Buddha in his royal sceptre: *kunte dhātuṃ nidhāpetvā*. See Mhv. Ch. XXV. v.1. Somebody at the royal household had invariably to play the role of Defender of the Faith. This is how the Mahāvamsa precisely records it and it means no less and no more than

*having deposited the relics in the royal sceptre.* Wherever the king went forth, in peace or in war, the royal sceptre had to be carried in front of him, indicating his royal presence. Gemunu had to announce and indicate why he was going to war and what he was fighting for, neither expansion nor annexation. But safeguarding and preserving the cherished possession of the Sri Lankans, namely the socio-religious culture of Buddhism which they had newly received. That is why he had the Buddha relics carried in front of him, honourably and respectfully carried in the royal sceptre. By no means despicably in the killer weapon- *kuntāyudhaya*. Why has somebody lost his sense of decency, dignity and decorum?

George Turnour who was the first to translate the Mahāvamsa into English, and that as far back as 1837, although not a son of the soil, seems to have clearly grasped and sized up the historical circumstances of the Duṭu Gemunu Elara war. He shows complete familiarity with the authentic Sri Lankan tradition which apparently had suffered no contamination so far. He translates the word *kunta* as the sceptre and imperial sceptre. We are not quite certain whether Turnour at that time already had access to the unmistakable authentic tradition of the Sinhala classics like the Thūpavamsa Sinhala translation [13th century]. Saddharmāṅkārāya [14th century and the Saddharmaratnākaraya [15th century], all of which refer to this *kunta* of Duṭu Gemunu as *Jayakontaya*, *Magul kontaya* and *Jayama kontaya*. Wijesinghe in his second edition of the Mahāvamsa translation of 1889 also carries the same translation as Turnour.

It took nearly four centuries to turn this harmless royal sceptre in which Duṭu Gemunu carried the Buddha relics [*kunte dhātuṃ nidhāpetvā*] into a murderous killer weapon, translating the word *kunta* as *kuntāyudhaya* [i.e. a weapon like a spear]. It is more than surprising that it should have happened in the hands of an eminent Buddhist scholar monk like the Venerable Hikkaduve Sri Sumangala. In the Sinhala translation of the Mahāvamsa he brought out in 1912, at Chapter 25 verse no. 1, he uses the Pali word *kunta* itself as it appears in the text, without giving it a Sinhala rendering. But at Ch. 25 verse no. 9, without batting an eye lid,

he rushes out to translate the same word *kunta* as *kuntāyudhaya* [i.e. *kunta* + *āyudhaya*]. This he did, we are compelled to infer, being perhaps heedlessly trapped in an upsurging wave of national or religious fanaticism in the land in which our eminent scholar monk was destined to get drowned. Lamentably, this happened not only to the monk himself, but to generations of succeeding historians, professors and translators.

We are more than baffled as we lay hands on a 1129 page new translation of the Mahāvamsa [An Annotated New Translation With Prolegomena], published in 1989 by Ananda W. P. Guruge. While we congratulate the author on this monumentally prodigious work and express our appreciation, we wish to draw the attention of the reader of this book to Ch. Twenty-five, verse no. 1, foot note no. 2. These notes fruitlessly endeavour to defend the mistranslation of the Pali word *kunta* in this context [which we have examined in great detail above] as spear or lance, saying that the spear as royal standard is always carried before the prince. In defence, Guruge says that both in Sanskrit and Pali the word is used in the sense of a weapon. Be that as it may. Let the Indologists discover the truth of this, and in this context in particular. In the Pali language, if the word *kunta* is used in that sense of a weapon, Venerable Mahanama, as the author of the Mahāvamsa would very well have known that he was implicating Duṭṭu Gemunu as a killer or murderer, and that he was seeking the posthumous power of the Buddha in this despicable act. This is what is foremost in the idea of tagging the word *āyudhaya*, by the translator, quite unwarranted, to the obviously harmless word *kunta*.

Our next pertinent question has to be whether our 1989 editor of the prodigious Mahāvamsa translation or his most revered predecessor, Venerable Hikkaduve Sri Sumangala Thera did ever set their eyes on the authentic, untarnished tradition of the three Sinhala classics, the Sinhala translation of the Thūpavamsa [13th century], Saddharmāṅkaraya [14th century] and the Saddharmaratnākaraya [15th century] which present the *kunta* as the imperial

sceptre. If you have had the luck to see them, how then do you turn your back on them? The answer is both important and urgent.

This real incident of carrying Buddha relics in the imperial sceptre by Duṭṭu Gemunu in his march to war became a historic event. The Sri Lankans were proud of it. They wanted to remember it down the ages. As far down as the 13th century, i.e. nearly one thousand years after the event, the Sinhala translation of the Pali Thūpavaṃsa refers to the *kunta* in this context as *dhātu-sahita-jaya-kontaya*, i.e. the royal sceptre with the relics enshrined within it. The 14th century Sinhala classic, the Saddharmāṅkārāya refers to the *kunta* in the same context as *maṅgala kontaya*. This is followed by the Saddharmaratnākaraya of the 15th century, referring to it as *dhāu-piḥṭavū jaya maha kontaya*.

For the educated elite or even the less educated in any part of the world, these references are clear and loud enough to indicate that the cultural upbringing of the Sinhala royalty in Sri Lanka at the time was acceptably high enough to prevent the vulgar coupling of religion with politics. But it is more than tragic that in the more recent and therefore more corroded and politically biased translation into Sinhala of the Mahāvaṃsa, in the early years of the 19th century, chose to give to the Pali word *kunta* the new rendering *kuntāyudhaya* [i.e. *kunta + āyudhaya* = the kunta, the weapon], willfully displacing the real and accepted renderings *jaya kontaya* and *maṅgala kontaya* of six and seven centuries earlier Sinhala classical texts.

Everybody who knows any Sinhala, monk or layman, had to know clearly that the word *āyudhaya* always means a weapon and in this context when it obviously implies the *hella* or spear, there can be no two words about it that an over enthusiastic Duṭṭu Gemunu is made to carry the relics of the Buddha within a killer weapon. In the war, it had to be used as a weapon. Why do Sinhala Buddhists, kings, monks or laymen, wait until after the war, to discover that fighting in a war implies destruction of life in a lamentable way? If it was to be used only as a symbol of royalty, why then distort the wording in the centuries old tradition of the

Sinhala Classics and arrogantly add the murderous word *āyudhaya* to it?

The open question here is who makes whom do this bastardly act? Some even have said that Buddhist monks gave the king the relics. Did those monks know that the king was going to carry the Buddha relics within a killer weapon? Or was it our learned translator monk who came on the scene centuries later transfer the relics from the sceptre to the killer weapon? Was the age in which this blunder in translation was committed or those who flourished in and around the time, monks or laymen, not sensitive enough to sense its vulgarity and offensiveness? For whose sake do we today, with international global licences for research, in any and every area, want to perpetuate this blasphemous distortion, any more in an age of new global cultural evaluations and assessments? Substituting the word lance in place of spear in subsequent writings does not in any way mitigate the offence, neither for the translators nor for the editors of later times. Dr. Ananda W. P. Guruge quotes with pride Alice Greenwald and her research entitled *The Relic on the Spear*. The data on which she works, using the word spear, we say is blunderously incorrect and therefore unacceptable. To us these are no more than glamorous adventures of ingenious new thinking based on fanciful Don Quixotic projects of fighting wind mills. Do we need at all to trace the fountains from where all these misinformed, misguided and misdirected research spring?

This Duṭu Gemunu episode is only one single incident in history about which we have attempted a comprehensive analysis with regard to the distortions it has suffered in the hands of eminent historians and subsequent ambitious researchers who have endeavoured, consciously or less consciously, to give extra flashes of brilliance to very down-to-earth events of every day life during this national encounter. Duṭu Gemunu's sole interest in the war against the Damilas was to firmly indicate to them where they had necessarily to stop for a peaceful co-existence of both parties in the same land. He had a seriousness of purpose and a deep seated sense of courage not to wade into areas of

platitudinous and flattering remarks with the enemy.

The State's respectful recognition of Brahmin Tivakka of the northern regions of the island during the arrival here of the sacred Bodhi tree from India and during the subsequent ceremonies connected with it shows ample evidence of the possibility that existed for amicable relations between the two resident groups in the land, relatively larger and smaller, one to the other. All these and many more items of vital interest like Duṭu Gemunu's alleged shedding of tears after his victory over Elara, on counting the numbers who had died in the war, Buddhist saints arriving through the air from the north to convince him that the number he killed in the war was not more than one and a half, all indicate a serious, but fanciful division of opinion among the Buddhists, as fact and fiction, on fundamental national issues. As in party politics, falsification of ideas of one party by the other had become the order of the day.

In the light of the indisputable original Sinhala classical tradition of the *mangala kontaya* of the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries regarding Duṭu Gemunu's march to war, carrying Buddha relics ahead of him, does the Indian lexicon tradition of a *kunta* meaning both a royal sceptre and a weapon, as adduced by Dr. Guruge, give freedom to any historian or student of languages to render Duṭu Gemunu's *kunta* as *kuntāyudhaya*? Read once again, in the light of what we have revealed, Dr. Guruge's ingenious self-liberating remarks on page 895 of his Mahavaṃsa: "Attempts to explain *kunta* as a *sceptre* and not a lance or a spear are unfounded as this word occurs in both Sanskrit and Pali in the sense of a weapon - AG."

As far back as 1987, during a keynote address delivered at the annual sessions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka [referred to above], we have examined from all possible angles this inexcusable error of blood-stained mistranslation, and offered a clue for the genesis of this disastrous tragic blunder. This undoubtedly is also why, according once again to our Mahavamsa tradition, this same *kunta* had to be, ere long, entombed for ever within the Mirisaveṭṭiya

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*stūpa*. The proceedings of this address were published in the Society Journal in 1989. Twenty years is a long enough time, not for any single one but for several generations of Indologists or Historians to have challenged what we have said. Nothing has come to us so far.

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